

Finding Joy When You Really Want to Weep (Elaine Ingalls Hogg)

Have you ever had one of those years when it seemed like everything went wrong? I have. Within the past few months, I've had to place my Dad in a nursing home, grieve my Mom's death, help my husband through two surgeries, and deal with other family issues. Some days I've been tempted to say, "Where are you God?"

During a recent family crisis, I paused to reflect on how some of my ancestors handled life's challenges. My great-grandmother Sarah Shepard's life and example came to mind. Sarah lived on a small island in the Bay of Fundy. Within five years she lost a daughter, a son died of heat stroke in World War I. Another son died because of an untreated infection, and most heartbreaking, her husband and baby son died on the same day. Yet, whenever I asked my family member about Sarah's life, they would say, "She was a woman of faith and courage."

How could this be? Faith and courage admit such overwhelming loss and grief. My answer came a few years ago, when I was researching my family tree and I discovered a note in Sarah's handwriting. It read: *"My children: I leave this old BOOK as the best heritage I can give. Study it carefully and you will find the way to peace and righteousness and happiness as I have done. If ever there is anything wrong with your lives, come back to this BOOK as if it were a looking glass, and it will clearly show you what is the matter. And when you are lost in the world, it will guide you home. Mother."*

I did feel like I was lost in the world. I picked up my Bible, the book Sarah referred to in her note, and I read the words from Psalm 84 (NLT): *"What joy for those who strength comes from the Lord... When they walk through the valley of weeping, it will become a place of refreshing Springs"*

I remember saying, "Well God, I sure feel like I'm going through a Valley of weeping. How can I find a place of refreshing Springs?" Then the thought came to me: Instead of focusing on the difficult things in your life, take your pen and write down anything that has lifted your spirits or brought you joy.

I grabbed my scribbler (which I've named my pig pen as the thoughts are random and the writing is messy), and I began to write inspiring quotes, emails from friends, family support, my neighbour brought me soup, etc. All little things but as I added to the list, my pig pen has provided a place of refreshing blessing. I am not alone. God has brought me words of comfort and demonstrated His care for me through the kind actions of friends and neighbors.

You too may be tempted to think that God doesn't care. Why not join me and take Sarah's advice? "Come back to the BOOK, it will guide (us) home."

